



PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Plague and Pets

Can pets transmit plague to humans?

Yes, people can get plague from an infected animal, but this is rare. Rodents (mice, rats and squirrels) and cats can carry plague. This disease most often occurs in the southwestern part of the U.S. Usually, people get plague from the bite of an infected flea. Since fleas bite both people and animals, especially cats and rodents, an infected flea can pass plague to animals or people. Sometimes, people get plague from working with an infected animal through a bite, or by having close contact with an animal that is coughing or sneezing due to pneumonic plague.

Can humans transmit plague to household pets?

It is possible but unlikely for people to transmit plague to cats through coughing or sneezing.

Although dogs can become infected with plague, they do not transmit the infection to people. The greatest plague-related threat posed by dogs is that they will bring infected fleas into the home.

If an outbreak occurs, does my pet need to be treated with antibiotics?

If your pet has been exposed to plague or is sick, call or visit your veterinarian. Your veterinarian will determine if your pet needs antibiotics.

Should I isolate my pet if he or she is sick?

Follow the instructions from your vet. Cats infected with pneumonic plague should be isolated for at least 48 hours after they begin taking antibiotics.

How can I protect myself and my household pet against plague?

- Wear gloves when handling animals that may be infected.
- Call the local health department if you see a sick or dead animal.
- Do not pick up or touch dead animals.
- Eliminate sources of food and nesting places for rodents around homes and other buildings. Seal all building openings larger than one-quarter inch.
- Treat cats and dogs for fleas. Homes can also be treated for fleas.
- Do not allow pets to roam outdoors freely.
- If your pet is ill, take them to the veterinarian for evaluation.
- Apply insect repellent to clothing or skin according to label directions to prevent flea bites.